

THE NEW YORK TIMES, THURSDAY, APRIL 17, 1986

How the U.S. Became a 'Demon'

By Fouad Ajami

We should see the military strike against Libya for what it is: a reprisal for a specific act of terror, and an invitation to the Libyan ruler to rethink his ways. We should also refrain from expecting great results.

If the Administration were to do so, Americans would find themselves with no alternative to yet another dosage of military power. The sad truth is that the terror will continue — and continue to test the patience of an America that insists on its innocence and its distance from the feuds and passions of the Middle East.

'The sad truth is that the terrorism will continue'



Tullio Pericoli

In hindsight, the military reprisal was inevitable. The Administration had cornered itself. The bomb planted in the discotheque in West Berlin provided a "smoking gun." With the evidence in hand, American officials waited for the Europeans, or for Muammar el-Qaddafi himself, to let them off the hook. A stern set of European economic and diplomatic sanctions would have forestalled American military action. So would have some indication from Mr. Qaddafi that he was willing to relent and change his ways. But when both hopes failed to materialize, the Reagan men had to make good on their rhetoric.

The irony has been evident for some time now: Under an Administration that vowed toughness against terrorism, a record number of Americans have been victims of attacks. A new wave of terror, begun in the aftermath of the war in Lebanon in 1982, claimed America and Americans as its principal targets. The promise of the war of 1982 was that it would bring terror to an end. But Americans lived to see a time of frenzied terror. America treated the place in a rough way, and it struck back.

Whether Americans liked it or not, the shadow of their power lay over the region. And for a while, in the aftermath of the 1982 war, the United States acted as though it had a design for the region. America seemed out to reorder Middle Eastern political life, impose a new political order in Lebanon, come up with some formula of sorts for the Palestinians, tip the scales in favor of pro-Western forces to its liking against an aggrieved nationalist movement. But America did not have enough power to prevail. What political and cultural presence it had in the region was enough to call forth a formidable assortment of enemies — Mr. Qaddafi, rejectionist Palestinians, radical Shites, the Syrian regime, and, further east, the pious piper of the embittered and the aggrieved, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in Iran.

A terrible wind was now blowing throughout the realm of Islam. Americans were caught there at a time when a large fight was breaking out — a fight for the soul and historic direction of that society. The middle ground in much of the Moslem world was caving under, caught between (frightened) privilege on the one side and (militant) wrath on the other. And America was inevitably on the side of privilege.

That is why, in a political world of

Fouad Ajami is professor of Middle Eastern studies at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies.

angels and demons, the distant superpower was turned into a demon. A decade of oil wealth and promise in the Moslem world was ending in failure and defeat. When the inevitable scapegoating came, America was the best kind of scapegoat because it had become part of the region's landscape, its feuds and calculations of power.

For the Palestinians — seeking revenge, stripped of their sanctuary in Lebanon — America stood between them and a Palestinian state. For the theocrats in Iran and Shiite Lebanon, America stood for cultural defilement, and it stopped them from overrunning their rivals in the region. And for the Syrians, there America was, cutting deals that excluded them — with the Lebanese, the Palestinians and the Jordanians — and sustaining

an Israeli drive to remake the politics of the fertile crescent. This amorphous world took America on the only way it could — with terror.

For their part, Americans had to give terror a name, had to organize it, assign it a return address, hold someone responsible. "Terror," they declared, "thy name is Muammar." Thus, last January, Americans imposed economic sanctions against Libya. But the sanctions were doomed. Washington couldn't carry the Europeans along. Then it set out to challenge Mr. Qaddafi's "Line of Death" in the Gulf of Sidra. It picked a fight with Mr. Qaddafi. Americans presumed, or wanted to believe, that this would give them a reprieve from terror. But Mr. Qaddafi knew no other way.

One interpretation of the "terrorism problem" holds that America is at this point because it has not sponsored an Arab-Israeli "peace pro-

cess" and is left trying to take on political problems through military means. In reality, to talk of a peace process that would end this wave of terror is naive. If Americans can be sure of anything, they can be sure of this: Nothing would inflame the passions of the extremists in the region more than a major American diplomatic initiative.

No American diplomatic scheme would spare America the fury of those bent upon eradicating its presence in the region. It is a false reading of a large civilization to say that the terror springs from the impasse between Israeli and Palestinian. It springs from that, but only partly so. More broadly, it springs from deeper social, economic and political pressures within Middle Eastern society, from the traumas of dislocated, newly urbanized youth, from the sense of men and women caught in terrible times that their world is being torn asunder.

And then again, the terror springs from another source. Some of it is hatched by merciless men for whom terror is a profession that pays, and pays well. It does not advance peace between Israeli and Palestinian to pretend that it would solve a problem much larger than their conflict. Indeed, if Americans are to embark upon a diplomatic initiative, they must have no illusions about it: Their enemies in the region will go on a rampage precisely to convince them of the futility of such an endeavor.

If the belief that a peace process would spare us terror is flawed, so, too, is the simple belief in military muscle. It is hard to convert military blows into political victories, all the more so in the region where those at the receiving end of American power have vast reservoirs of cultural sympathy and support to draw upon. We think of Mr. Qaddafi as an isolated, hated figure in his region, and he is. But Americans underestimate the extent to which he acts out the anti-Western resentments of more ordinary, mainstream opinion, and the way his world cushions him against the attacks of a foreign power.

There is something antimilitaristic about military power. Once it is deployed, those who deployed it come to learn of its limits. This is particularly

so in the case of a democratic power with qualms, a power that sets such store by the morality of its foreign interventions.

What does America do next? The hope is that it will be spared yet another venture into Libya. That the hope rests in large measure on Mr. Qaddafi's deeds must temper the claim that the Reagan Administration has just concluded a "successful" operation against him. Mr. Qaddafi may yet fall. If so, the remarkable luck of the Administration would have held, and American foreign policy could take credit for the fall of yet another dictator. The Administration would have succeeded where Mr. Qaddafi's domestic and Arab opponents had failed.

But Mr. Qaddafi has been both culprit and metaphor for the wider phenomenon of a terror beyond comprehension. He exemplifies a sensibility that cares nothing for American judgments and morality. Most Americans feel good about the raid, but they ought to remember that the culprit is still on the loose. Even were we to be rid of him, there is a larger enemy out there, an impasse with other men, a rage born of an encounter between strangers who traffic with one another only to make a demon of each other.

Those of us who see adventurism in Reagan's foreign policy look with a wary eye on Libya. But it is the critics to see difference in decisive difference. Libyan action and, for Reagan policy on Nicaragua. Ends. In Nicaragua, driven by ideology and ideological target: the Marxist-oriented Government. The object of action is not an ideology, but an undoubted evildoer: terrorism.

Means. In Nicaragua, Administration, espionage, diplomacy, covert military force that murder, carries out other acts. The military action in many warnings and economic efforts.

Facts. The President has produced no convincing evidence to support some of his main charges against the Nicaraguan Government, notably the charge of aggression against its Central American neighbors. But no one in Colonel Qaddafi has sponsored terrorism, targeting American and has invaded and neighbors.

Law. In the case of the Reagan Administration, from the law, petulantly of the World Court. In Libya it relied on a legs that violence against the of repeated violence is just act of self-defence.

Those differences were. Mr. Reagan's very announcement of the raid on Tripoli. The his televised speech was the tone careful and showed a sense of proportion the threat he saw without

How far it was from the bole, the propagandistic President's speeches on Just a month ago, in his appeal for aid to the "Cuba. Reagan used blood-curdling to paralyze horrors with basis in fact. His own speech dismissed his claim that the deal in drugs.

There was a strong sense in Mr. Reagan's words about another crucial point.

you believe

Sometimes college s

Imagine that you're an intelligent youngster—perhaps extremely intelligent—who's well motivated and emotionally healthy. And then imagine your frustration because you're bright enough to know you've got a special learning problem.

The problem is dyslexia, and it affects about one out of every 10 Americans. Dyslexia is a complex of neurological disabilities that inhibits the ability to recognize symbols and process them. The condition can make it excruciatingly difficult to acquire basic language skills such as reading, writing, and spelling, and the more difficult ones such as note-taking, outlining and summarizing. It can also make it very hard to learn non-language symbol systems such as mathematics and music.

Dyslexia is a chronic condition, with no known cure. Because its victims are otherwise normal, they may be pigeonholed as careless or lazy—or their intelligence may be questioned. So they

need
Ea
indi
every
head
to by
to rec
lectur
oral, i
stude
skills,

FOREIGN AFFAIRS | Flora Lewis

The Concern Is Results

BLOOMINGTON, Ind. There are many more doubts about the wisdom of the U.S. attack on Libya here at Indiana University than TV reports indicate among the public at large. A college climate encourages thinking about

What will the air raid accomplish?

moves will be decided "case by case."

The overriding purpose of the American President has to be to protect the lives of American citizens. The "success" of the attack has to be measured in those terms, not by the